

The Protest at Spires.

menace to Luther and his followers. The Recess had not prevented the persecution of Lutherans in Catholic States, and at a second Diet which met at Spires in February 1529 the Catholic majority proved, at his instigation, decidedly hostile. If it did not go all the length in the direction of reaction that Charles demanded, and resented his autocratic tone, it gave expression to the determination that Catholicism was to be the dominant religion within the empire, and that Lutheranism was only to exist on sufferance. There was to be toleration for Catholics in Lutheran States, but no toleration for Lutherans in Catholic States, and in both the followers of Zwingli were to be suppressed. This meant a dead halt for the Lutheran movement, and would be followed in due course by its suppression. The Lutheran princes (six in number) and fourteen cities protested on the ground that no unanimous decision of a former Diet could be repealed by a mere majority, and appealed to conscience as the true arbiter in things religious (20th April 1529). "We fear God's wrath more than we fear the emperor's law " was the retort of these " Protestants," in spite of Melancthon's nervous apprehensions for the consequences. They chose the manly course of opposing God and conscience to Kaiser and majority, be the consequences what they might. As at Worms, so at Spires, conscience won the victory, in spite of the fact that conscience was in the minority. Unfortunately, as the terrible decree against the Anabaptists shows, the victory was not a victory for the rights of the Protestant conscience in the wider sense. The men who protested against the oppression of the Lutheran conscience voted, with the noble exception of the landgrave, for the destruction of Anabaptists by fire and sword without distinction of sex.

True, it looked as if the emperor, with the majority at his back, would now make short shrift with the Protestant minority, which was unfortunately further weakened by the outburst of controversy between Lutherans and Zwinglians. In the end of December 1529 the imperial coronation at Bologna proclaimed to the world the reconciliation of pope and emperor, Six months later Charles rode into Augsburg to win or overawe the Protestants into submission. Instead of yielding, their theologians presented a confession of their faith